

A Crisis of Representation: Antisemitism and Inclusion in Higher Education Unions

Executive Summary

Higher education unions are central to academic life. They shape working conditions, advocate for fair treatment, and give members a collective voice in the institutions where they teach, research, and learn. At their best, unions are grounded in solidarity, democratic participation, and the principle that every member deserves representation. It is precisely because unions play this vital role that concerns about exclusion, antisemitism, and failures of representation within them require serious attention.

This report, produced in partnership by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the Academic Engagement Network (AEN), examines growing concerns that some higher education unions are not fully meeting their responsibility to represent Jewish members fairly, address antisemitism seriously, and protect viewpoint diversity within their ranks. ADL and AEN undertook this work to better understand how union governance, campus politics, and activist dynamics can create environments in which Jewish faculty and graduate students feel marginalized, silenced, or inadequately represented within their unions.

Drawing on incident reports, member accounts, union materials, and campus developments, the report finds that some higher education unions have become flashpoints for conflicts involving antisemitism, Israel, Zionism, and Jewish identity. In some cases, highly organized activist factions have used low-participation governance processes to advance divisive political positions without broad member consensus. In others, mainstream Jewish voices are subject to such open hostility by anti-Israel activists that they lose the opportunity to meaningfully engage in their union's democratic processes.

These dynamics distract from core labor priorities, including wages, working conditions, academic freedom, job security, and fair treatment. They also erode trust and internal cohesion, particularly when Jewish faculty and graduate students experience exclusion,

hostility, silencing, or fear of retaliation for raising concerns about antisemitism or expressing views related to Jewish identity, Israel, or Zionism.

This report is intended as a constructive intervention: not to weaken unions, but to strengthen them as democratic, inclusive, and accountable institutions. With greater transparency, broader member engagement, renewed focus on labor priorities, and serious attention to antisemitism alongside other forms of discrimination, faculty and graduate student unions can better represent the full diversity of their membership.

This report includes testimonials from faculty members within AEN's and ADL's networks who volunteered to contribute their perspectives on antisemitism and anti-Israel bias within unions. For confidentiality reasons, we have removed identifying information from these quotes.

"I quit [the union] around the time that [they] had second thoughts about opposing BDS against Israel."

"I understand from many colleagues that they have already left the union in large numbers due in large part to a June 2021 "Resolution in Support of the Palestinian People" of the Delegate Assembly. This highly controversial resolution...labeled Israel an "apartheid" state and encouraged chapters to debate supporting the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement."

"I have been told that I am wrong for being "unwilling" to separate Israel and antisemitism, even though my own feelings of Judaism are connected to Israel."

"The term "Zionist" is applied as a slur if you express an opinion other than full condemnation of Israel"

"A union cannot credibly defend academic freedom while dismissing the life experience of its Jewish members."

"[The] union drafted a letter to the college's president objecting to the presence on campus of a former IDF soldier."

"The climate...has significantly worsened since October 7th."

"A delegate from my union local introduced a very extreme and one-sided resolution promoting the genocide libel against Israel."

“In short, the climate in my union local was quickly becoming toxic for Jewish members...I, myself, was labelled a “Zionist” and ousted from a leadership position. The climate eventually became so hostile...that I resigned from the local.”

“The union has...supposedly embraced academic freedom but actually only for those who want to shut down and prevent people who are Zionist from teaching.”

“The union has done little to nothing to combat antisemitism within its ranks.”

“I no longer feel that the national organization can represent me equally...Union leadership has not addressed antisemitism with any seriousness or clarity.”

Introduction

Faculty and graduate student unions have become increasingly important actors in higher education. Across the country, more faculty members, graduate workers, postdoctoral researchers, and other academic employees are organizing to improve wages, benefits, job security, workplace protections, and institutional accountability. This growth reflects legitimate and often urgent concerns about the changing nature of academic labor.

At the same time, higher education has become more polarized. Campus debates over Israel, Zionism, antisemitism, academic freedom, and political expression have intensified, particularly in the wake of the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack on Israel and the subsequent Israel-Hamas war. These debates have not remained confined to classrooms, student organizations, or public demonstrations. They have increasingly entered faculty and graduate student unions, where labor advocacy, institutional politics, and campus activism now often intersect.

This report comes at a moment when those intersections require closer examination. Faculty and graduate student unions matter because they are not simply bargaining units. They shape institutional culture and affect the terms and substance of campus discourse. Their public statements, resolutions, endorsements, and internal governance decisions can signal who is included, whose concerns are taken seriously, and whether members with differing views feel able to participate fully.

In recent years, some academic unions have expanded their activism beyond traditional workplace priorities into fervent anti-Israel advocacy, sometimes in ways that are perceived as deeply biased and antisemitic. Although unions have long taken positions on broader questions of justice and public policy, this activism has made it harder for

many Jewish members to participate in union life when positions on Israel, Zionism, or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are adopted without meaningful member consensus, when Jewish members are marginalized or even attacked for speaking out, or when concerns about biased framing and antisemitic rhetoric are dismissed rather than taken seriously. In these circumstances, union spaces that are supposed to represent and protect all members can instead become places where Jewish faculty and graduate students feel pressured to self-censor, withdraw or risk hostility, silencing, and retaliation.

The purpose of this report is to examine these emerging concerns with care and specificity. It focuses on higher education unions, drawing from case studies, member experiences, public actions, incident reports, union materials, and governance practices over recent years. The report does not argue against unionization or collective bargaining. Rather, it asks how academic labor organizations can better fulfill their democratic and representative responsibilities in a polarized campus environment and meaningfully respond to the concerns of their Jewish members.

By identifying patterns, risks, and opportunities for reform, this report seeks to strengthen unions as inclusive institutions. Faculty and graduate student unions are most effective when they protect workers' rights, encourage broad participation, respect viewpoint diversity, and ensure that Jewish members, like all members, are heard, represented, and protected.

Emerging Trends in Faculty and Graduate Union Activity

Recent years have seen a marked increase in anti-Israel activity within faculty and graduate unions. These include boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) initiatives, one-sided statements on Israeli policy, and events and programming featuring anti-Israel narratives.

Perhaps the most significant shift has occurred within the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), a union and membership association of faculty and other academic professionals with members and chapters at colleges and universities throughout the US. In 2024, the AAUP [reversed](#) its longstanding policy against academic boycotts, instead declaring that they “can be considered legitimate tactical responses to conditions that are fundamentally incompatible with the mission of higher education.” The newly stated position provides legitimacy to attempts to boycott Israeli academic institutions, despite the clear violation of academic freedom they represent.

The AAUP has also hosted virulently anti-Israel programming, such as a [2025 webinar on “scholasticide in Palestine.”](#) promoting the false narrative that Israel deliberately seeks to destroy the Palestinian educational system. Requests from organizations such

as ADL and AEN for the AAUP to broaden its programmatic offerings to include differing perspectives were ignored.

Most recently, the AAUP broke with 110 years of precedent by issuing its first-ever national electoral endorsement, backing a candidate for the U.S. Senate. This unprecedented endorsement further raises concerns about the AAUP's departure from institutional neutrality and its willingness to engage in partisan politics.

The AAUP is not an isolated example. Similar patterns have emerged across faculty and graduate unions nationwide, suggesting a broader shift in how unions engage with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These trends include:

"I've been a lifelong supporter of labor unions...that's why it has been so painful since October 7 to see what has been happening with the AAUP. The AAUP does not seem to represent members like me anymore."

"The academic blog that is published by the AAUP published an essay describing October 7 as a revolt and calling the claim of rampant campus antisemitism a big lie."

Official BDS and Divestment Initiatives

One notable trend is the increasing use of unions to advance official BDS campaigns and institutional divestment efforts.

- Student Workers of Columbia (SWC), a union representing about 3,500 student workers, [voted](#) in favor of authorizing a strike in 2026, where the strike demands included calling for an academic and economic boycott of Israel.
- The California Faculty Association (CFA), representing 23 campuses, [passed](#) a 2025 resolution calling on the California State University (CSU) system to "immediately and permanently" terminate study abroad programs and institutional partnerships with Israeli universities, explicitly citing the AAUP's revised position on academic boycotts and alleging Israeli "scholasticide," "apartheid," and "genocide."
- At MIT, the Graduate Student Union (GSU) initially required its members to fund pro-BDS groups, before [being forced](#) to drop this policy by Jewish graduate students and their legal advocates.
- In 2024, the City University of New York (CUNY) faculty union [passed](#) a resolution supporting BDS and calling Israel an "apartheid...settler colonial state."

- In 2024, Rutgers AAUP-AFT passed a [resolution](#) titled "Resolution on Divestment from Genocide in Gaza" that called for academic and economic boycotts of Israel.
- Cornell Graduate Students United [passed a referendum](#) to adopt a statement titled "International Solidarity with the Palestinian Liberation Struggle," which endorsed boycotting Israeli academic and cultural institutions and divesting from Israeli companies, and also supported "[Palestinians'] unequivocal human right to resist oppression by any means necessary," which many believed was a promotion of terrorism and other forms of violence against Israelis and Jews.

"At [a union] convention in October 2023 - which began just 17 days after October 7th - a delegate from my union local introduced a very extreme and one-sided resolution promoting the genocide libel against Israel...I led the fight against it and drafted an alternative substitute resolution that the delegates at the convention eventually adopted instead."

"The first antisemitic, anti-Israel resolution was adopted about a month and a half after the [October 7] massacres...Originally, membership wasn't told about it and when I brought that to the attention of the membership, I was accused of launching a hate campaign against the union."

"The union has embraced BDS."

Union Communications and Programming

Another emerging trend is the incorporation of anti-Israel advocacy into official union communications. As these positions become embedded in union-sponsored newsletters, webinars, conferences, training materials, and public campaigns, they carry the imprimatur of the organization rather than reflecting the views of its individual members. For many Jewish members, this can contribute to feelings of exclusion, marginalization, or pressure to conform to particular political positions as a condition for full participation in union activities.

Examples include:

- The Palestine, Arab and Muslim Caucus of the California Faculty Association [released](#) multiple official [statements](#) about the 2026 Iran war, describing the U.S. and Israel as "the most dangerous, utterly fascist and genocidal force in the world today," condemning U.S. and Israeli strikes on Iran, and calling for "resistance" against an "Imperialist-Zionist agenda."
- In 2025, the Executive Board of the Rutgers Adjunct Faculty Union [voted](#) to endorse a statement and press release that stated, in part, "The Rutgers Adjunct

Faculty Union Executive Board condemns the recent non-reappointment of three adjunct faculty members and termination of a fourth at the City University of New York (CUNY), in what clearly appears to be retaliation for their public opposition to the ongoing Israeli genocide in Palestine...CUNY should defend the rights of its educators and students whose opposition to genocide and the ongoing Nakba is being smeared as antisemitic." That same year, the Rutgers Adjunct Faculty Union [called on](#) Chancellor Rodríguez and the CUNY Board of Trustees to repost a job announcement that Governor Kathy Hochul had ordered Hunter College to remove because she considered it to be antisemitic. This followed a 2024 [incident](#), wherein the Rutgers AAUP-AFT Executive Council and Rutgers Adjunct Faculty Union Executive Board endorsed the statement, "The IHRA Bills Are a Threat to Academic Freedom and Free Speech."

- In 2024, the Santa Cruz Faculty Association co-authored Academic Senate resolutions condemning alleged "[scholasticide](#)" in Palestine and defending [anti-Zionist departmental positions and statements](#) as matters of academic freedom.

"[The] union drafted a letter to the college's president objecting to the presence on campus of a former IDF soldier."

Integration with Campus Activism

Faculty and graduate unions have also increasingly partnered with activist organizations and incorporated anti-Israel activism into official union activities.

Examples include:

- The Student Workers of Columbia (SWC) has a long [history of anti-Israel activity](#), choosing to join the Columbia University Apartheid Divest (CUAD) coalition, an anti-Israel campus group that includes Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) and Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP). While the three groups are not recognized by Columbia and were therefore ineligible to organize protests, the connection to SWC allowed protests to be categorized as union actions. SWC's president was even expelled from campus following his participation in violent anti-Israel protests in 2024.
- The California Faculty Association and Students for Quality Education [reserved](#) campus space for Students for Justice in Palestine's (SJP) mock "apartheid wall" installation at San Diego State University.
- In 2025, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and Students for Quality Education at Cal Poly, Humboldt held a protest on campus, where protestors called for divestment. Humboldt California Faculty Association President Ryder Dschida spoke, [expressing](#), "America has provided over \$21 billion in military aid

to the Israeli government and [Israeli leader Benjamin] Netanyahu's government's ongoing so-called War in Gaza. Beginning on the seventh of October, 67,000 of Palestinians have been killed in this ruthless genocide... As a peace-loving person, I cannot and will not accept this. I cannot and will not support a genocide and its supporters."

Harassment and Hostility Toward Zionist Members

Faculty and graduate unions have also, at times, become environments in which Zionist members have reportedly faced derogatory rhetoric and hostility from union leaders or in official union communications. These incidents raise concerns about whether members who identify as Zionist can participate fully in union life without fear of intimidation or exclusion.

Examples include:

- At City College of San Francisco, a union leader reportedly called a Jewish instructor a "colonizer" and insulted her name during an interaction. The leader allegedly followed up by sending the instructor an email containing similar derogatory language.
- After Columbia University's Antisemitism Task Force recommended increasing viewpoint diversity by hiring Middle East scholars who were "not explicitly anti-Zionist," the Student Workers of Columbia (SWC) – the graduate student union – became the site of extensive derogatory commentary about Zionists in an official union group text. In a group chat, participants reportedly [mocked](#) the recommendation with comments such as "affirmative action for Zionist academics," referred to Zionism as equivalent to racism, derided the concept of intellectual diversity on Zionism, and dismissed concerns raised in the Task Force report. Months later, an SWC board member cautioned participants to be careful about what they posted, while adding that they were personally comfortable saying "death to America" and "death to Israel" and describing Zionism as "Jewish supremacy" and "white supremacy."

"I have been told that I am wrong for being "unwilling" to separate Israel and antisemitism, even though my own feelings of Judaism are connected to Israel."

"The term "Zionist" is applied as a slur if you express an opinion other than full condemnation of Israel"

“The climate in my union local was quickly becoming toxic for Jewish members...I, myself, was labelled a “Zionist” and ousted from a leadership position.”

“The union has...supposedly embraced academic freedom but actually only for those who want to shut down and prevent people who are Zionist from teaching. For example, a union member attacked my classroom...and the union did not defend me, but has rallied behind [the other member].”

Taken together, these examples illustrate the extent to which anti-Israel advocacy has become a prominent feature of many faculty and graduate unions' public activities. This broader pattern is reflected in a [2026 study](#) of graduate student unions affiliated with teachers' unions which publicly post information. It found that 76% had taken public positions critical of Israel and/or in support of Palestinians, with dozens and sometimes hundreds of public critical comments about Israel. This is in contrast to the much smaller percentage of public comments about the war in Ukraine or violence against anti-regime protesters in Iran.

Impacts and Effects

The above examples suggest that many faculty and graduate student unions have expanded beyond their traditional focus on workplace conditions, salaries and wages, employee benefits, professional standards, and academic freedom to take official positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, often adopting vehemently anti-Israel stances. This shift has a profound reputational impact - when union funds, networks, and official messaging platforms are used to support anti-Israel narratives, and when union leadership promotes, amplifies, and even initiates such campaigns, unions are no longer seen as impartial organizations seeking to support the professional and economic interests of their members. Rather, they are perceived - quite rightly - as politicized entities thereby making it easier for anti-union activists to weaken the power of unions.

Of course, in addition to reputational effects, the promotion of one-sided anti-Israel narratives within many unions leaves Jewish and Zionist members feeling marginalized and unrepresented. The singling out of Israel for condemnation, often with demonizing and delegitimizing rhetoric, is perceived by many as an attack on their identity. Some have reported that their concerns have been ignored, minimized, or even derided, and others have expressed reluctance to provide personal information to union leaders known to be radically anti-Israel. They do not feel represented in the union's negotiations with their universities, and many have withdrawn from leadership opportunities or other forms of participation within the union. This combination of hostility and indifference has led some Jewish and Zionist union members to reach out

to [legal counsel](#) to ensure that they are not forced to pay union dues to support causes they feel are against their core beliefs.

The professional “homelessness” that has resulted from sustained hostility should be unacceptable to all who wish for an inclusive academy.¹

The adoption of highly polarized positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can have significant implications for internal union cohesion. Rather than fostering solidarity around shared workplace concerns, these campaigns may deepen divisions among members who hold diverse political views and identities. When union leadership prioritizes contentious geopolitical advocacy over traditional representational responsibilities, some members may question whether the union continues to reflect their interests and concerns. This can contribute to reduced participation in union activities, lower engagement in governance and leadership opportunities, and diminished confidence in the union's ability to represent its membership impartially. Over time, declining trust in leadership and weakening member engagement risk undermining the broad-based solidarity and collective purpose that are essential to an effective and representative union.

Taken together, these developments have significant consequences for unions and the broader academic community. Reputational harm, declining member trust, reduced participation, and the alienation of Jewish and Zionist members risk weakening internal cohesion and undermining confidence in unions as representative organizations. Over time, these effects may diminish unions' ability to effectively advocate for and unite the diverse constituencies they serve.

Why Academic Union Spaces Are Especially Vulnerable

Academic unions play an important role in protecting workers, improving workplace conditions, and giving faculty and graduate students a collective voice. But certain features of academic union governance and culture can also make these spaces especially vulnerable to ideological capture, biased anti-Israel activism, and antisemitism. These risks are particularly serious when union processes allow small groups to speak in the name of the entire membership, while Jewish members who object feel unable to participate without facing hostility or professional consequences.

Structural Features

¹ Public-sector unions face an additional constraint following the Supreme Court's decision in *Janus v. AFSCME* (2018), which held that nonmembers cannot be compelled to pay agency fees. As a result, unions have a direct financial incentive to ensure that all employees they represent - including those holding minority viewpoints within their membership - feel respected rather than alienated, since members who conclude that a union no longer represents them can withdraw both their affiliation and their financial support.

Many unions, including higher education ones, are governed through systems with which most members rarely engage. Elections, membership meetings, committee processes, and votes on resolutions often have low turnout. As a result, a small number of highly motivated members can exert outsized influence over union priorities, leadership, and public positions. This can allow controversial political campaigns, including anti-Israel campaigns, to be advanced as though they reflect the views of the full membership when, in reality, many members may be unaware, disengaged, or reluctant to participate.

“[In] May 2024, 21 of 35 union members who were present voted on behalf of our entire union local - at that time roughly 250 members - to endorse a statement in solidarity with student protests. The statement promoted the genocide libel against Israel, but it failed to condemn the atrocities committed by Hamas on October 7th, 2023 or call for the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages abducted by Hamas. The statement also endorsed the demands of the student protestors, including the demand [to] cut all ties with Israeli institutions, which explicitly meant eliminating academic programs in which I was, and remain, actively involved.”

In 2021, the CUNY PSC Delegate Assembly [adopted](#) a "Resolution in Support of the Palestinian People" accusing Israel of being occupiers and an apartheid state. The vote occurred in the union's representative Delegate Assembly – not through a vote of the entire membership – and afterwards hundreds of members objected that the resolution did not reflect the views of the broader union. The Executive Council reviewed this resolution, voted against it and proposed a substitute. PSC later published a forum containing numerous member responses, including criticism that there had been insufficient notice and little opportunity for broader membership discussion.

Rapid resolution processes can compound this problem. Statements or resolutions on Israel, Zionism, or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict may be introduced, debated, and adopted quickly, with limited opportunity for scrutiny, amendment, or consultation with Jewish or other members with opposing viewpoints. When these processes move faster than members can reasonably respond, they can produce inflammatory positions that dismiss Jewish concerns as merely political objections.

Procedural complexity also creates barriers to meaningful participation. Union bylaws, meeting rules, caucus structures, voting procedures, and amendment processes are likely unfamiliar to many members. Those who understand the rules can use them strategically to shape outcomes, while less versed members may find it difficult to intervene effectively. For Jewish faculty and graduate students, this complexity can

make it especially difficult to challenge hostile and derogatory language, oppose biased resolutions, or object to processes that exclude their perspectives.

Cultural Features

Academic union spaces are shaped by the broader culture within academia, where there are often strong ideological pressures to conform to prevailing orthodoxies. In some settings, anti-Israel positions are framed as the only morally legitimate stance, while objections from Jewish members are dismissed as reactionary, privileged or made in bad-faith. This creates a climate in which Jewish members may feel that raising concerns about antisemitism carries professional risk and will lead to suspicion rather than serious engagement.

The blurring of labor advocacy and political activism heightens these risks. Unions exist to represent members in relation to their working conditions, but some academic unions increasingly take positions on global conflicts and political causes far removed from workplace representation. When anti-Israel advocacy becomes embedded in union activity, Jewish members may be forced to confront hostile political messaging in spaces meant to be utilized for workplace protection and collective bargaining.

Social media further intensifies this problem. Controversial and heated union meetings can now be amplified publicly, with remarks often cast in simplified or accusatory terms. Members who dissent from anti-Israel positions may be doxxed and stigmatized online. This creates reputational pressure and discourages open discussion, especially for members who fear being labeled as opponents of social justice simply for objecting to antisemitism, anti-Israel bias, or political advocacy.

“On [the] delegate listserv, union members frequently speak against Israel, while rarely criticizing other foreign nations, and also promote the toxification of anything having to do with Israel or Jews...One delegate sent notification of a free June 15, 2026 webinar [titled] “Drop the ADL from Schools.”...The next day, [the delegate] sent information about a film detailing the “the nefarious, racist history of the ADL”...During a discussion of...a university-wide program to help such [Black] students, [a delegate] raised the irrelevant issue of a supposed lawsuit brought by a Jewish employer at [the] College alleging discrimination. [The delegate] added that this employee is “a Zionist.”

As highlighted in an earlier section of this report, a related cultural problem is the growing expectation that unions should take positions on global issues unrelated to workplace concerns. Once this norm is established, silence on a particular controversial international issue may be viewed as complicity and an endorsement of the status quo. Members may then be pressured to support statements that do not reflect their views.

In the context of Israel and the Middle East conflict, such union activities can quickly become exclusionary for Jewish members, particularly when statements deny Jewish peoplehood, erase Jewish historical ties to Israel, or apply standards to Israel that are not applied to other nations or conflicts. Yet, it is important to also note that the effects of such advocacy are not limited to Jewish union members. When unions adopt official positions on contentious geopolitical issues that fall outside their core representational function, they may also alienate members who believe that the union should remain focused on workplace matters rather than political advocacy. For example, more than 170 members of MIT's Graduate Student Union (GSU) signed an open letter criticizing the union leadership for dedicating "significant time and resources to take a position on the Israel-Hamas war – deviating and detracting from the GSU's core mission of representing collective labor interests of all graduate students." The signatories concluded that this "has served to weaken our union and alienate its members," illustrating that the institutional consequences of mission drift extend beyond those directly affected by antisemitism and anti-Israel bias.

Misuse of Free Speech Frameworks

Free expression, open debate, and peaceful protest are foundational values within higher education and union life. Faculty, graduate students, and other academic employees must be able to criticize the institutions in which they work, organize politically, and express dissenting views without fear of punishment or suppression.

At the same time, protecting free expression does not require unions to tolerate antisemitism, identity-based harassment, intimidation, or exclusionary conduct directed at Jewish and Zionist members. Unions have an obligation not only to protect debate, but also to ensure that all faculty and graduate students can participate fully and safely in union activities without being targeted because of their identity, beliefs, or real or perceived support of Israel or Zionism.

Concerns about antisemitism are also sometimes framed reflexively as attempts to suppress political speech or censor criticism of Israel. This framing can itself become a barrier to meaningful discussion. Jewish members who report exclusion, hostility, or discriminatory treatment are not demanding their unions to prohibit disagreement; they are asking unions to recognize when conduct crosses the line from civil and respectful debate into hateful rhetoric and discriminatory conduct, including intimidation, exclusion, harassment, or retaliation.

Similarly, appeals to academic freedom should not assist union leadership in avoiding accountability for behavior that undermines equal participation within union spaces.

Academic freedom protects inquiry, teaching, scholarship, and expression. It does not require unions to tolerate discriminatory conduct, such as targeted harassment or retaliation against members based on their identity or viewpoint.

Protecting free expression and addressing antisemitism are not incompatible goals. Strong unions and healthy academic communities must be able to do both simultaneously: preserve robust debate while ensuring that Jewish and Zionist members, like all members, can participate fully and safely without fear of intimidation, exclusion, or hostility.

Professional Vulnerabilities

Many members of academic unions occupy professionally vulnerable positions. Graduate students often depend on advisors, departments, funding committees, and recommendation letters. If union spaces become hostile to Jewish students and to those who object to antisemitism, they may reasonably fear that speaking up could affect their professional relationships, success in their academic programs, or future career trajectories.

Junior and contingent faculty face similar concerns and more acute risks than full-time, tenured faculty. Tenure, promotion, publication opportunities, and scholarly reputation depend on strong professional networks and are often influenced by the judgments of colleagues and the field's senior academics. A junior or contingent faculty member who challenges antisemitism or anti-Israel bias within their union may worry that they will be seen as "difficult" or out of step with prevailing disciplinary perspectives. Even when retaliation is not explicit, the fear of professional consequences can be enough to silence participation.

These vulnerabilities create a chilling effect. Jewish faculty and graduate students may avoid union meetings, decline to participate in caucuses, remain silent during votes, or withdraw from union life altogether. The result is a cycle in which the members most in need of union support are less able to contest antisemitism and anti-Israel bias, while the union becomes increasingly dominated by those who face fewer risks in advancing radical positions.

"Following October 7...I quit the organization and canceled my \$50/month support of the chapter."

"I understand from many colleagues that they have already left the union in large numbers due in large part to a June 2021 "Resolution in Support of the Palestinian People" of the Delegate Assembly. This highly controversial

resolution...labeled Israel an "apartheid" state and encouraged chapters to debate supporting the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement."

"The climate eventually became so hostile...that I resigned from the local."

For these reasons, antisemitism in union spaces is not only a matter of individual bias or isolated misconduct. It is also a structural problem. Low participation, procedural opacity, ideological conformity, public reputational pressure, and professional dependency can combine to make academic unions uniquely difficult spaces for Jewish members to navigate. When unions fail to recognize these dynamics, they risk abandoning their core obligation: to represent and protect all members equally.

Conclusion

Higher education unions can be powerful engines of democratic representation. They are strongest when they bring members together across differences and give them a shared voice in the conditions that shape their professional lives.

Fostering and advancing this democratic purpose depends on equal belonging and parity of participation for all, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, nationality, or national origin. Jewish faculty and graduate students cannot be expected to participate fully in union life if doing so means entering spaces where antisemitism is tolerated, their concerns are dismissed, or their identities and lived experiences are treated as suspect and illegitimate. When that happens, the problem is not only harm to individual members; it is a union failure.

The task ahead is therefore not limited to responding to particular incidents after they occur in piecemeal fashion. Addressing the problem requires unions to examine the conditions that allow exclusionary dynamics to develop and to ensure that their processes, culture, and advocacy remains accountable to all members.

If unions are to speak in the name of their members, they must ensure that Jewish members are not pushed to the margins of that collective voice. The goal is not special treatment, but equal membership: the ability to participate, dissent, and be represented without fear of exclusion or retaliation.